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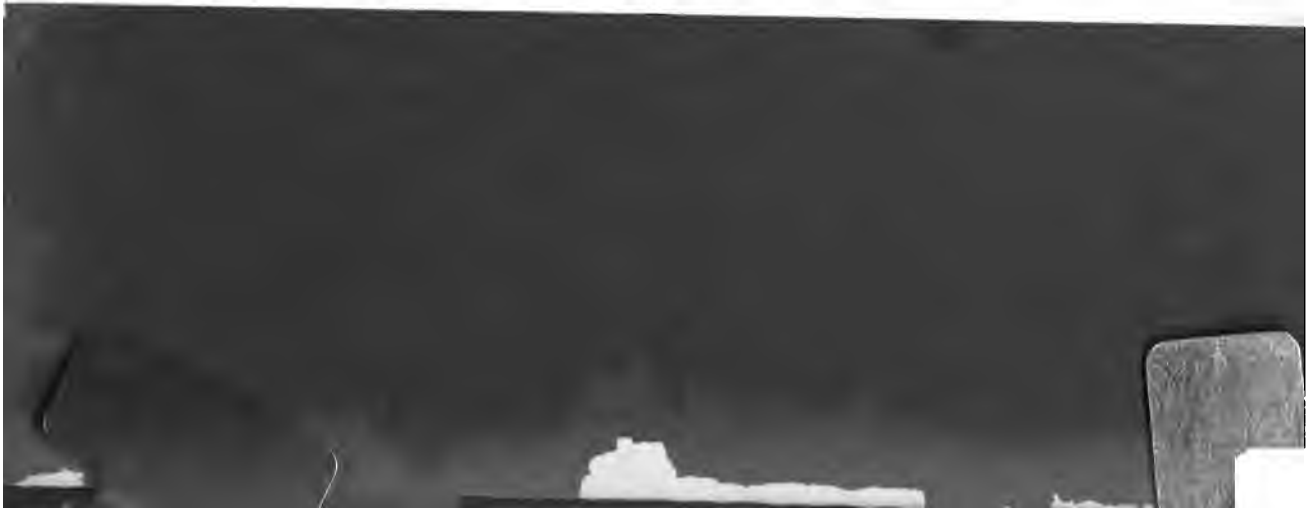
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AND
OTHER
VERSE

LILIAN SHUMAN DREYFUS



IN PRAISE OF LEAVES

AND OTHER VERSE

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IN PRAISE OF LEAVES

AND OTHER VERSE

BY

LILIAN SHUMAN DREYFUS

(Lilian Gertrude Shuman)

"And then there crept
A little noiseless noise among the leaves
Born of the very sigh that silence heaves."
—KEATS.



BOSTON
LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO.

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IN PRAISE OF LEAVES.

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To my Mother

HETTIE LANG SHUMAN

Stumbling, we see the future as a cup
Which she no longer stores with bread and wine,
And where our human longing, yours and mine,
Is all the incense we may offer up.

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THE LEAVES

I

IN PRAISE OF LEAVES

WITH open palms held shyly to the sky,
Like acolytes that tremble as they vow,
The frail leaves waver on the tranquil bough.
The hush that hails the dusk, itself a sigh,
Presses the trees, too startled to reply.
The slender shadows of the spring are fled,
And summer's slumbrous masses, in their stead,
Linger beneath the nestling's lullaby.
O you, brave harbingers of bridal Junes,
Most patient Leaves, whose charm is selfless grace,
What dower hovers in your lisping runes
That thus you dare so near the heaven's face?
What lovers lorn, O craving Leaves, are you,
The thankless clouds eternally to woo?

II

THE VICTOR'S CROWN

WITHIN the tree-tops, fearfully and still,
The Victor's crown is woven; leaf on leaf
Night's windy fingers ply their purpose brief.
Shaped with unerring craft, the branches thrill
With prophecies the centuries fulfil,
Faint voices severed from their vernal souls.
What aspirant lurks here, whom triumph doles
A trophy which the foundling breezes will?
What one is he the wilderness doth guide,
Baring, with lure of Bay, its thicket door?
Hath he a hope to breast the rustling tide
Surging and breaking on a spaceless shore?
Or is he led, enslaved by wishes deep,
A Victor, vanquished, to his empty sleep?

III

THE SUPPLICANT

LO, it is he! his eyes like stars agleam,
His parted lips that droop with memories mute,
His yearning hands that clasp the sacred lute.
From out the clamorous dark, with steps that seem
To follow, ever hope-impaled, a beam
Pursuant, on he presses, snared in gloom.
Upon his brow the laurel's verdant doom
Rests like the fadeless pinions of a dream.
With haunting litanies the air awakes,
Vibrant with tones whose rapture is a pain,
The paling branches part, where hesitates
A shadow, backward gazing once again:
Still backward gazing, Orpheus heart, to meet
Eternity within a moment fleet.

IV

POSSESSION

OH art thou he, whose voice is melody,
Whose soul is as a harp the eve-winds stir,
Until its song shall reach the soul of Her?
Oh art thou he, whose whole desire must be
For ever sealed within an alien sea,
That leafy sea, where thou hast all forgot,
Save that thou lingerest yet where She is not?
Oh, Orpheus, calling still Eurydice!
There art thou prisoned 'mid the tossing waves
Of spindrift green, engulfing thee apart,
There must thou bide; no Lesbos lulls thy staves,
Or quenches night's wild longing in thy heart;
Thou whose wide gaze did pierce the Stygian mist,
Supreme possessor, who in loss . . . yet kissed!

RECOGNITION

I LEFT the toilsome streets and fared
  Unto the world of trees,
The faces of men's windows glared
  With sunset's smouldering ease.

Beyond the elbowed throngs I came
  Unto a world of sky,
I found no voice there raised to blame,
  Or my bound day decry.

Beneath the gloaming of a pine
  I rested, knowing then
What greater loneliness was mine
  Within that world of men.

KITH

WITHIN the forest's close embrace,
My soul its kinsfolk met,
Tall pines, with strings that interlace,
The winds might tune and fret.

The larches turned their breasts to me,
Each homeward beckoning,
Their midmost, primal mystery
Beyond my reckoning.

Then to that parent-house I crept,
While Silence counselled near,
And in the cup my heart had kept,
For welcome dropped a tear.

FOREST SOUND

I HEARD the twilight sounds that slip
Within the awe-hushed wood,
The sudden call of bird, the trip
Of insect hardihood.

I saw the poplar trees that glowed
Within their tawny barks,
Each tinkling leaf, a bell that showed
A tongue of silver sparks.

I felt upon my cheek the whir
Of free, mysterious life,
The half-hid wings of things that stir
An unguessed soul to strife.

The breath of waters followed me,
Like quickened sighs at night,
Where little winds made minstrelsy
'Gainst boughs of frail delight.

About me pressed, how unaware,
The woodland's spirit-cry,
Till driven from that Eden there
A forest-voice roam I!

FOREST SHADE

COLOR and shade slip hand in hand
Within the forest deeps,
Where cradled 'neath each sunny strand,
A shadow lightly sleeps.

The maiden birches know a way
To gather veils of white,
Which gleaming o'er them through the day,
Are beacons lit at night.

The grounded ferns are wise with lore
Of pigments wrought of gems,
That glow like thin, transparent ore,
Upon their slender stems.

The darkness winds a substance pale
About the tree-trunks' girth,
And chains the lichens, gray as hail,
Unto the eboned earth.

The roots of lavender and brown
Enwreathe the tree-gnomes' urns,
While man, whose graves are in the town,
To tired memory turns.

CHALLENGE

THE aspen fauns their clappers took
All made of leaves like blades,
And on the breeze the quick notes shook
Unto the Dryad glades.

The hemlocks heard the challenge tossed
Across the pagan waste,
And with their verdant fingers crossed
Their trembling breasts in haste.

The white pines each a taper swung
That lit June's christening,
High where the shadow-pastures hung
Like incense glistening.

The mist hills, blue with heavens flushed,
Brooded like early morn;
Their quiet voice the clamor hushed
Human with symbols lorn.

Still 'neath those silenced mountains wage
Fresh challenge and pursuit —
Perchance man may, with lesser gage,
His soul to leaves transmute.

IN PASSING

PASSING, I heard the cricket's wail
Cleft by the voice of leaves,
Leaves, whose bare cheeks on mine, like hail,
The wind-spray hurtling, heaves.

Passing, I saw the grasses weighed
With mists of memoried things,
Things, whose far flight upon me laid,
The shadow of their wings.

APPARITION

THROUGH the blue distance loom the laden heights,
Changeless 'mid lives of men that come and go,
With dwindling outlines where the cloud-blooms blow,
Inured to time they fend the valley's rights.
Crowding the water's edge, the laughing flights
Of grass-weed bend, and crested pine-waves rise
And fall, sighing their praises to the skies.
Now is it night, bound earthward with delights
Of all the secret, solitary things
Which Nature in her holy scrip doth bind, —
Close darkness, and the sleeper's wind that sings,
A shadow-moon with giant trees entwined,
Some startled soul, in corporate wonder pent,
Spying the vision from himself outsent.

LAKE MEADOWS

WHERE waters, by some Merlin charm empearled,
Until their silence inundates the world,
Shape the stern rocks, and mould them to their end,
Forging of ages, tools that grind and bend,

I sit and watch the silver-flowered moon,
Swift fleeing in her cloud-bedraggled shoon,
A solitary star upon her brow,
Like genius, burdened with its novice-vow.

A bird slips suddenly, his trail
Cleaving a shadow's lonely sail,
Where beaten meadows of the lake flow clear,
Sown with a rippling harvest far and near.

THE LINGERING PAN

THE haunted woodland is awake
With memories of a lingering Pan,
Here last, beside the trembling brake,
He rested, when the night began.

His syrinx broken lies beyond,
A stifled heart-cry mute within,
No mocking Echo may respond
To notes tossed wildly, shrill and thin.

By pines, that severed like a shell,
Still murmur of dim seas, long lost,
My soul and I sit, 'neath a spell,
And watch the tangled tree-tops crossed.

We may not stir, nor sleep, nor sing,
But gaze entranced on waters clear,
Where, mirrored with a broken wing,
We see our imaged selves draw near.

Will he not come, the laughing god,
  And free us from immortal ties,
Since we, small-fashioned of the sod,
  Must worship with earth's measured eyes?

Alas, thou Pan of glen and tree,
  Weird minstrel of a windy gleam,
Though wistful, thus we chance on thee,
  Thou leav'st us pinioned in our dream.

WINGS

THE heart-wings in me woke and stirred,
Within the forest night,
They stirred like little leaves half heard
'Twixt pauses in their flight.

"Be quiet, restless heart," I said,
As working hours crept,
"Art thou still mourner of thy dead?
Long thou hast served and wept!"

Oh heart-wings, wilt thou folded be?
For keen are dawn's sad eyes,
And day must not the far wings see,
Night's cloister hours surprise.

TRYST

GENTLY the amber twilight lifts her wings
And drifts away into a world of gray,
Trackless her path, save where the tottering day
With hands despairing to her vesture clings,
Until in pity one last look she flings!
Now hath each russet cloud, pursuing, fled,
And night's first wind-song, beating wild, hath sped
Beyond the urgency of mortal things.
Like running rivers made of molten wax
Which stiffen into barren grooves of age,
Unfathomed lie the moon-trails, long and lax,
Upon a sky where unlit stars presage.
Lo, stand we here with hearts that still persist,
While youth's blind shadows hold forgotten tryst.

REVOCATION

THE loud day hath his earthly vesture shed,
And wide beyond our seeming chance hath fled;
The twilight hath her gleaming hair unbound,
And wrapped within its shadows every sound.

Beyond the darkened drift of green-bowed leas,
The dim sails trail upon horizoned seas,
And while the cricket, born in bondage, sings,
My vagrant soul would spread Icarian wings.

AFTER RAIN

OH, make not count of joys the city holds
Within its maundering, capricious folds—
The joys the weary may attain are brief
As closed within the rondeau of a leaf.

In city coverts for the anxious hire,
Await the joys the joyous may desire—
What balm of Gilead may the weary gain
Like scent of country meadows after rain?

AUTUMN WIND

THE wind awoke, and with his stealthy hands,
He grasped the tree-limbs in a mighty hold;
He swayed the branches in their tented fold,
And forced them, sighing, to his vassal bands;
He stole among the leaves with shrill commands
And tore their clinging cradles as they slept;
He heeded not earth's children as they wept,
Nor recked he, creedless, Nature's terse demands
For when with tardy haste he turned to soar,
The branches wove a net, and bound him there,
Which, as he struggled, ever tangled more,
Until at last his breathless heart lay bare.
Upon the verdant hillside now there looms
A scarlet feather torn from sanguined plumes.

"SHORT SWALLOW-FLIGHTS OF SONG"

AMBUSH

THERE is a little bird that wings
Across my crystal hour of morn,
A termless undertone he sings,
Muffled, and purposeless, and worn.

And listening now, it seems to me,
My heart is as that little bird,
Wayfaring in captivity,
With burden of a song unheard.

INTANGIBLE

I KNOW a sound, so quiet, still,
It seemeth echo more than sound,
Its curious, hushed insistency,
Lureth, like waters, winter-bound.

I know a light, so lambent, frail,
It scarcely seemeth light to me,
Fringed with a dwindling afterglow,
A saint's pale halo it might be.

I know a touch of pain, so vague,
It seemeth like a shadow-thing,
Beyond some outer reach of mine,
It lingereth, furtive, hungering.

THE STAFF

I LEFT him where the roadways verge,
The friend whose silences were speech,
(We did not speak because the surge
Of silence drowned the words in each.)

I did not turn, but in the calm
I knew he waited there for me,
And that his touch upon my palm
A pilgrim's staff had grown to be.

THE QUIET ROOM

WITHIN the quiet room there is no strife,
Its still, cool walls bar in unfathomed life;
I cannot hear the boom where the dread tide
Of human breakers beats the farther side.

Within the quiet room there is no sign
Of tables spread to feed this soul of mine,
But while grim hunger crouches, like a beast,
I sit me down to silence as a feast.

SALVAGE

HE took the flowers that Love gave,
(Such pity in her eyes!)
He doubted not their balm might save
His soul's most dark emprise.

He thought Love's radiant hands had made
The garden whence they grew,
He did not know that Love may trade
Her petals wet with dew.

FULFILMENT

HE said, "Enough if Life but give,
Bread, and the worker's sleep,
And space for little joys to live,
Content my heart shall keep."

Life gave, but hungry-hearted, he,
Now waits, unmemoried, fed:
Knowing, that answered verily,
Life gave him stones for bread.

RENUNCIATION

WITH monkish rite and dirge
She sought her soul to purge,
Yet found but spectral rest,
In her unquiet breast.

Now like a shadow seed,
Passive 'neath winter need,
Incurious seasons roll
Above her silent soul.

RETREAT

WITH fervid heart he trod
Appointed ways to God,
Yet found he but the lone
Man-idol carved of stone.

Now with unhasting feet,
Treads he to sure retreat,
Where vernal altars lurk,
Reared to the Goddess, Work.

TWILIGHT LAND

I KNOW a land where silence dwells,
  And mysteries of sound are still,
And in that land all colors merge,
  Outvoicing silence like a thrill.

And since I know no other name,
  I call it Twilight Land, and say,
Perchance my soul had strayed therein
  Before it found its human way.

THE OLD HOUSE

CALMLY it waits — nor earth's indifferent face,
Nor time, the pensioner, nor laws' disgrace,
Shall its self-sanctioned isolation trace,
Or serve its unwreathed hearthstone to debase.

What shadows hold your rooms and corridors,
Old House? What dreams walk your enfranchised floors?
What little words, where now your silence soars?
And shall men boast tribunal masked as yours?

REMEMBERED

HE asked me if the dream was happiness,
(His words are in my heart as in a nest),
And I, who am afraid of joy, I said:
"I do not know. I only thought it rest."

SEA-TURN

I LEFT a friend, but when I came again,
I found a stranger, clad in friendly guise;
So on a summer night, the instant rain
Treads on the sea-turn, faced with sharp surmise.

I left a shepherd, tending flocks of thoughts,
I found a judge who sheared them till they bled;
What sudden turn of chance, what spur exhorts
This alien hither — drawn where famine led?

"SINCE WORDS ARE ONLY WORDS"

FOOTPRINTS LIKE MEMORIES

ALONG the roadway fare I, where the grass
Bows 'neath the dust-yoked winds of every-
day.
Wayfarer I, knowing the birds that stray
Like wander-souls across night's shadow-glass.
Immutable the laws whereby I pass
Ever upon the road the lonely know,
Nor may I follow filmy tracks that show
Footprints like memories which the years amass.
" Footprints like memories," said I, for they lead
Unto the neighbor paths that vein the world,
Separate the ways, yet with divergent speed
Of courses preordained, they touch, are furled,
And part again — their goals a dwindling maze,
Where Life, a famished Israel, may but gaze.

TO A FRIEND

MY Friend, who ever through firm years has seemed
Dowered beyond wish with human work to do,
How is it my blind heart had never dreamed
That you, home-souled as I, were lonely too?

In silences uncomforted are caught
Those healing hands forever spent anew,
Hands whose attainment all too dearly bought,
Discoverers are that you are lonely too!

To-day I found you crowned with blessed toil,
Tolerant 'mid praises — I, the lowly, knew! —
How came it, Friend, through patient years' recoil,
Only to-day I knew you lonely too?

THE DREAM-GATHERER

I GATHERED all my dreams, till one by one,
They lay like flowers trembling in their sheaves,
I who did build a garden, hardly won
From sterile silence, unreclaimed of leaves.

I gathered all my dreams, and placed them where
Their fragrance might await me in the Dark,
Nor wonderingly I grope to shelter there
Led through the distance by some latent lark.

I gathered all my dreams, till now they seem
To be the granary wherefrom I knead
My daily bread (the garden's seedling dream),
My daily bread more real than living deed.

"To every man there come noble thoughts, that pass across his heart like great white birds." — MAETERLINCK.

THE great white birds of thought, how close, yet fleet,
They loose their pinions o'er the restless day,
And while the heart of man plods on its way,
Unseen they flock with tidings nobly sweet.
Humble, and oft unwelcomed, do they greet
The orphaned present with a kindred past,
While sudden memory starts to face at last
Beauty unrecognized by its near beat.
But oh, the birds with sunset on their wings,
That cross the heart of man with furtive cries,
Casting a shadow of unbidden things,
Blenched as the portent-moon in sea-bound skies,
What thoughts are these, whose noiseless plumes alight,
Spurring man's silent soul, and lost in night?

"Does the soul only flower on nights of storm?"

— MAETERLINCK.

IS it on stormy birthnights then, alone,
The soul may flower, large with blossoms tense,
With dews whose poignant, ominous incense
Fosters the shapeless deed 'mid carnage sown?
Is it, then, solely when the world has grown
Pygmy, before some I, but now aware
Of its soul vision, hitherto so fair,
Cast forth at last while rain and wind make moan?
What of the toiler's unrecorded days,
Unbourgeoned nights of stars, and hours still-born?
What of the youthless — they whose arid bays
Earth's image-breakers fit to brows forsworn?
What if untended, dwarfed 'neath commonplace,
The soul should blossom petalled thrice in grace?

ALTERNATIVE

THE aftermath of failure? who would choose
'Twixt deeds that festival remembrance lose,
The dreary wisdom of the day slipped by,
And life outpeering with a stranger eye?

The Victory of failure? who may tell
Of final peace where strivings sleeping dwell,
Shall triumph or defeat, denuded, win,
At the barred doors "where no hope enters in"?

APOSTASY

LORD, grant me, said I, conscious life to live,
Days memorable with vital tasks to do,
Bare me the face of fact, and lead me through
The thrusts that verity doth take and give.
Out in the world where motives war and shrive,
Teach me to pierce the finely tissued mesh
That veils illusion 'twixt the soul and flesh;
Man's signal thought reveal — my need forgive!
So said I, Lord, who now my prayer revoke,
Begging instead, the grails that come not true,
The simple heart of faith, the quiet yoke
Of shadows distant as their rootless rue.
Yield me unquickened vision now to see
Within my untried dreams, reality.

LITANY

GIVE me thy shadows, youth,
O beautiful — and dim!
See, with thy laurelled truth,
My needy brows I trim!

Thy shadows, grant, and dreams,
O manifold — and frail!
Now with Promethean gleams
I come thy Light to hail!

Thy dreams, the changelings,
O radiant — and wist!
They slumber 'neath their wings
Night-folded in their mist!

O youth, thy shadowed star,
Thy dream-illumined face,
Now I, begirt, afar,
Uncomforted, retrace!

MY LITTLE MOTHER

MY little Mother — you from whom I took
My daily blessings thoughtless of their source,
My yearly service witless of its force,
What days on days must clamorous silence brook
This peopled presence without voice or look?
My little Mother, now you answer not,
Wondering, I catch your quick response, forgot
Amid the lax assurance habit took.
My little Mother, now, a miser sad,
I hoard each smile which ministered my need,
Each ready gift of you, your heart made glad,
I gather now, to purge my lonely greed —
And like a child 'mid newer friends astray,
Ever I seek my friend of every day.

THE DREAM-CHILD

HAVE you seen the Dream-child pass this way?
Hush, or you stir his quiet sleep!
Have you seen his little face to-day,
Drowsy with wonder still and deep?

Have you marked how radiant heaven left
Its trace expectant in his eyes?
Have you seen the Dream-child pass bereft?
Hush, or you stir his shadow-cries!

THE HERITAGE

THOU tired Soul, far buried in the gloom
Of all the alien selves I may but guess,
How have I borne thy heritage, thy stress
Of things remembered, thy immortal doom
Cassandra-like, to peer where augurs loom
Of deeds to come, dumb craven now, 'neath fears
Of sights portentous stormed unto deaf ears?
What wast thou ere within the shadowed room
Of my bare dwelling thou didst find a place?
Through what dim centuries of flight, and whence
Camest thou, my days impermanent to trace?
Where wilt thou roam when thou must flee from hence
Once more into the wilderness alone—
Poor Soul! unhoused, thy pride lies fallen, prone!

MY LADY OF CLOUDS

CRADLED in mist, is my Lady of Clouds,
She is veiled with a shadow of wandering sky,
She is rocked by the winds from their Eden on high,
Oh, white as the Dawn, is my Lady of Clouds!

On thy shrine burn the stars, — my Lady of Clouds,
They illumine my dreams, that baffle the morn,
And my soul that beheld thee, still watches forlorn,
My soul now tempestuous, — Lady of Clouds!

JOY RIDING SWIFTLY

JOY riding swiftly, looms at times too great
This little earthen world-shell to include,
Man only hearkens passive to the rude
Untutored soul-cries, that, aroused too late,
For sudden, very dumbness seal his fate.
Joy riding swiftly, passeth by unknown
The yearning, silent ones to hope outgrown,
Who would the stranger hail, yet hesitate.
Not so plods Grief, who walks with lagging gait,
Until man learns to know her sober face,
Prepares averted greeting as he waits,
Foreseeing her sure advent in the place;
Like to some Adam, on whose wakened ears
Falls the first mated sense of lethal fears.

ON A PORTRAIT OF ROSSETTI BY WATTS

ROSSETTI! In thy slumbrous eyes I peer,
Seeking the twilight child still mazed in dreams
'Mid holy images and magic streams.
What lone pursuit is thine, remote and dear?
What brooding laughters, shadowy with fear,
Lurk in the chalice of thy lips so drawn?
What hours, whose Cadmean triumphs mourn
Youth's myrtle crowns, hold thee envisaged near?
Art thou still staring with thy prophet gaze
Upon that tablet wrought with hands elate,
Where leans a visioned Beatrice, 'mid a maze
Of haloed hair and brow predestinate?
How thy great soul must beat its cloistered wings
To pierce the poppied silence where she sings!

THE LADY CLAIRE

THE Lady Claire hath sat her down,
Beside her jester true,
In all the country, knight nor clown
Might her dear bidding do.

The Lady Claire hath sighed, I ween,
Her jester hears, and laughs!
And sowing secret tears between,
Her jester pipes and quaffs.

Yet he who pipes and quaffs, well knows
A jester's heart is true,
Hath he not spared the wayside rose
Sweet with anointed dew?

A jester is a merry wight,
A wayside rose is fair,
Earth's leveller, the dream-willed night,
Enchains the Lady Claire!

THE IMAGE

WITH blinded eyes a sculptor wrought,
Witless of conscious time or thought,
Shaping with fingers, soul-impelled,
The image that his dreams had held.

And lo, when suddenly the blight
Was lifted from his curtained sight,
With startled surety he faced
The impulse that his skill had traced.

An apparition small and dim,
Frail as a cloud of April whim,
Revealing, manifest and true,
The very creed a groundling knew.

The sculptor moulds, the poet dreams,
The painter steeps his brush in gleams,
The minstrel stirs his harp and sings,
Each, wistful, lifts his moulted wings.

A world they shape, from self outcast,
The Inner Image to the last,
Yet wonder that their God must be
Conceived to limits that they see.

THE THREE FRIENDS

"And three firm friends, more sure than day and night,
Himself, his Maker, and the Angel Death."

— S. T. COLERIDGE.

MAN has "three friends, more sure than day and night,
Himself, his Maker, and the Angel Death."
The first? What friend is this, a careless breath,
A pledge of yesterday, this sorry wight
"Himself!" A flickering candle-flame of light,
This soul's own enemy, forever tossed
'Mid cramped pursuance of the moment lost!
The second, then, "his Maker"? From what height
Gazeth He deedless, on man's bitter need?
What brittle law such Arbiter appoints?
The third? Nay, this . . . the Healer who anoints,
The "Angel Death," who waits with sleepless eye,
To garner man's dear dreams that tremble by?

DIVERGENCE

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for,
the evidence of things not seen."

SO writ is faith. She with her rainbow shrouds
Trails the wide waters of intransient space,
Pandora's beryl box she lids with clouds,
'Neath wings of prayer glimmers her promised face.

Unwrit is life. She with unlettered hands
Fingers her pence in calm exactitude,
Viewing in mirrors, where at gaze she stands,
Satan or God transfixed to memories nude.

SPRING SEQUENCE

I

THE SPRING

LAST night I peered into the dark, but spied
Naught save the winter's visage, and the rim
Of steel about the tethered moon, that dim
And cold, loomed 'mid its shadows, deified.
To-day I wake, and hark! a robin's bride
Rivets the breeze with one long, joyous note,
A strain outpoured so swift, no ear can quote,
No conscious heart can fathom! Far and wide,
Proserpine, the home-enhungered, sows
Green questionings to stir each bursting bough,
The miracle of resurrection glows
Within the sunshine-freighted air, where now
Throbbing desire spreads a prism wing,
And morning heaves with breaths of perfumed
Spring.

II

STORM-CHASED

CLOSE to the ground, huddled on wing for fright,
The storm-chased leaves fly tottering through the air;
The murmuring sweeps the barren tree-tops where
Æolian tones, long dumb, now loosed in flight,
Echo tempestuously from height to height.
Wild streams of melody the prisoned wind
Plays on Pan's broken pipes, all vainly thinned
With wintry gusts of seasons lapsed from sight,
With tensioned cries, more human than their pain.
Close to my window through the burdened hours
Riots unceasing the down-trodden rain,
Wrecking in triumph Spring's first garnered bowers,
Blinding the face of day with darkness torn
From out night's trustful fold to hopes forlorn.

III

THE MELODY

THRICE echoed rings the pine tree's low-voiced call,
Through Spring's soft crevices of moss and green,
Stirring the withered harvest, brown and lean
Of last year's leaves, that shiver as they fall.
The trailing May-buds wake, and shake their pall
Of winter free, and peer, wet-eyed, abroad,
With timid promise of their fragrant hoard.
What is this melody, now great, now small,
That strikes the wandering viols of the air,
Like lullabies moon-maidens dare in sleep
To cradled waters rocked beneath their care:
What pagan chant, Euterpe, this, to creep
Into a mortal soul with fear and pain,
With surging needs, as meaningless as vain?

IV

DAY SHUTS ITS TROUBLED EYES AND SLEEPS

THE gray day shuts its troubled eyes and sleeps,
Stroked by the lingering fingers of a sun
Hidden in mists, face muffled like a nun,
Fading beneath the veil of cloud that sweeps
The shadow-realm of night that vaguely creeps.
Dumbly a widowed sparrow droops a wing
Through paling heavens torn with windy Spring,
Startling the gleaming haze where April peeps.
Now in her sodden caves may Sorrow hold
The solitary vigil day debars,
Now from her rifted nest, Joy manifold
May share her radiance with the early stars.
While, careless of earth's mummer-soul that weeps
Or smiles, day shuts its troubled eyes and sleeps.

LOST SPRING

LOST Spring is in the air —
We may not sing, —
Its petals buried lie,
And yet we cling
Unto the lessening instant
While we say
"To-morrow," and we house the frost
To-day.

Lost Spring is far afield —
Its birds have flown,
We know their way was south,
From us outgrown,
And yet we hold one feather
While we plead
" To-morrow," and the silence is
Our need.

Lost Spring is near to-night —
We hear its lute
Stilling the harvest winds
So long since mute,
We tend our withered lilies
As we smile
Once more "To-morrow," . . . and we grow
The while.

NIGHT VOICES AT SEA

I

THE GULLS

ITS cloud-smoothed plumes unfurled, the last white gull
Forswears the tolerant largess of the sea,
And with prismatic pomp of heraldry,
It dips its colors to the ship's proud hull.
One moment poised, and 'midst the sharpened lull,
The gracious feathers melt to sky and mist,
While sudden distance quickens, day dismissed,
That linked earth-tokens to the waters dull.
Yet as the night, whose woman-heart is lone,
Fearful of thoughts day-silenced from her door,
Stirs in her windy sleep, it seems the moan
Of twilight birds resumes the sundered shore,
And on the spacious air the touch remote
Of memoried wings reclaims the dreaming boat.

II

WIND–LEAVES

ONE other sound, at night, the ocean knows,
As keen as star-songs, or the brush of wings,
A furtive, lisping sound, whose murmur brings
A fragrance with it, like the scent that blows
Between cheek-petals of a brier rose.
Oh, wondrous is the whisper, strangely strung
As alien cedars sprung from Lebanon,
As rustling grasses caught in sunset throes:
For then the ocean, twinned with night at birth,
Hears the great cry, like Echo in her caves,
Wrung from the staple forests of the earth,
That in majestic verdure walk the waves.
Ah, well it knows that cry of waters wide,
One with the wind-leaves and their branch-tossed
tide.

WINDS AT SEA

THROUGH the long leaves of darkness following,
They chase the solitary ship at sea,
Horizon-thonged, their leashes hollowing
The stemless waves that breast eternity.

Ever with piping sighs they circle round
The stiffened cordage of the masts until
Their woodland silences are huge with sound,
And all their sudden, strident claims are still.

EUROS

(The Southeast Wind)

O BRAVE, swift wind, self-centred and untamed,
That stirs the patient air and will not rest,
Wise with the burden of unfathomed quest,
Breathless with haste of labors yet unblamed,
What covert centuries have crept unnamed
Since that my soul did race with thee, nor knew
The gloom-winged harpy gaining as we flew?
What dawns have trembled into noons that flamed
With altar-fires from a Dryad shrine?
What harmony yet lingers o'er thy lyre
Whence Hermes, hidden in a leaf, did twine
A laurel wreath for loves that never tire?
Since thou didst touch my brow in that far sky,
Is there no mortal goal will satisfy?

RETURN TO ITALY

II

MY Italy, again thy voice I hear,
Thy voice like many voices, taut with dreams,
Thy cry, like murmurs of transalpine streams.
Stranger, more secret, do thy banks appear,
Than once when I did enter without fear,
When all thy hill-perched towns that brooding nest,
Like migratory birds upon thy breast,
Held forth wayfaring shrines of flowers sere.
Deeper, more shadowed, do thy valleys loom,
Caught in the meshes of thy tangled vine,
Larger with portent, too, thy clouds which gloom
The current-riddled seas with coral fine;
And more mysterious still, thy hidden face
Glows, like a vestal flame, some god did trace.

TWILIGHT SILENCE

THE Silence like a furry mantle came,
Wrapt itself o'er me till my soul was still,
And all the immanent, contrarious will,
Which man must nurture, though he may not tame,
Lay dormant 'neath outdistanced praise and blame,
As voiceless as a March-tongued plantain tree:
Nor was I 'ware this spirit pressing me,
Ground to one dumbness, life, that hummed like flame.
Now, while the evening, with its gradual hand,
Thinned the lithe shadows of the almond bloom,
And hushed, with cooling breath, the sound-creased land,
A sudden bell toned vibrant through the gloom.
Then did I hear the quiet's minster-roar
Peal 'gainst the lintel of my soul's closed door.

APOLLO AND DAPHNE

(A statue in the Borghese Palace, by Bernini)

SNARED in the marble—living neath the mesh
That binds with stony touch the tender flesh—
Breathless they stand, there where the Master's art
Has willed them prisoned, never to depart.

Her wind-blown tresses, rivalling the breeze
For sweetness, tangled 'mid the springtime trees,
Flutter in leafy masses 'gainst the breast
Surging in eager chase upon its quest.

With pleading lips she stares into the skies,
Awed with a sudden maze of wild surprise,
As now, her prayer fulfilled, she rooted stands,
While shudderingly the bark o'ercreeps her hands.

He, vanquished, winged and spurred with swift
desire,
Certain of fate decreed by godly ire,
Pauses with arm outstretched to grasp the goal
Where, lost to him forever, hides the soul.

Will they thus everlastingly outspeed
The clouds that man must follow in his need?
Will they ne'er wake, some living, thrilling day,
Crowned by Apollo's rustling wreath of bay?

Into the well of close eternity,
The stricken eyes of Daphne may not see,
Only her heaving heart beneath its snow,
A white palimpsest is, we may not know.

WRITTEN IN VENICE

I

BEYOND the slender range of Dolomites,
Where, nodding like two wrinkled, ancient crones,
Verona to her neighbor, Padua, drones,
We came upon that road whose towered heights
Await the shriner Asolo invites.
Well-worn our ways through mulberries and vines
Unto the phantom-land where Venice twines
A charm about her glow-worm satellites.
The gondolieri ply their quiet oars,
The sombre craft slips seaward to the stars,
The silence, with mute praises, clasps the shores,
All sound, save lisp of waters, it debars.
'Mid dark lagunes, the shadows mass their spoils,
Circling the city, sleeping in their toils.

II

A CLEOPATRA, say, of cities this,
Rising with smile triumphant 'mid her past,
A youth that ageless doth with time contrast
The slow decay of sovereignty and bliss.
Her wooers are the centuries that kiss
Away the tempests which would scar her brow,
That brow of cloudless majesty, where now
Its diadem of Empire none may miss.
Of "infinite variety," still young,
As when o'er sea and land she held her sway,
Small marvel that her mystic bidding, swung
About the poets, turned their hearts to clay.
Yet, though they bow before her at command,
No second Antony may claim her hand.

III

ONE Poet came to kneel before her throne —
A pilgrim isolate amid his kin,
Craving retreat his dreams might slumber in.
Venice, in queenly giving, gentler grown,
Proud at her court such homage to have known,
To Browning with a royal welcome rose.
Upon the girdled Grand Canal he chose
A refuge where the tamed sea tarried prone.
Columned in gray, the Rezzonico hoar
(Cried you "Palazzo Browning," boatman, then?)
Still stands with windows fixed on Byron's door,
Barred 'gainst remembrance, uninscribed by men;
Forgotten Moncenigo — has Time said
That once thy threshold knew my Shelley's tread?

I

THE BAY OF SPEZIA

LIKE some cloud image visitant on earth,
Driven perchance into a dwelling-place
Too cramped and finite for its spirit race,
So cinctured, yet immortal in its birth,
The Bay of Spezia nestles in its girth.
The marble-visaged Apennines arise
Above its seeming, rivalling the skies
That grope towards it, tender in their mirth.
The cliffs, with moon-grown olive branches hung,
With terraced vineyard, and with villas bright,
Circle in ease symmetrical among
The glossy inlets, steeped in pristine light.
From Porto Venere the Corsair caves
Hurl to Palmaria their sacred staves.

II

LERICI

BECALMED within her coves, Lerici lies,
Lost in a drowsy revery of age,
With sleepy eyelids dreaming of a page
From out the woven tome her memory plies.
Upon the waters wide, once more she spies
A gleaming sail that hovered there of yore,
A frail, slight shallop with a trailing oar,
Fluttering seaward, as the white gull flies.
Adventuring, a Poet drifts, his brow
Bent o'er a volume resting on his knee:
Slowly his mystic eyes he lifts, and now
Scans the vine-creeping steeps that clasp the sea.
Lerici's vigil hath no answer won
From the unfaltering horizon's sun.

III

VILLA MAGNI

THERE have I stood, and chastened by his name,
With silence knelt — a shadow at a shrine;
There have I given thanks, while breezes brine
Murmured monotonies of youth and fame,
Like votive anthems droned with soul aflame!
There have I wandered, while the memoried air
Whispered of dreams evasive, sadly fair,
Of crystal faith earth could not crush or tame.
Surely within those walls there lurks some trace
Of that white spirit lingering there awhile,
Some promise of a song — some cloudy grace
Hid there to presage weary men a smile,
Some touch of that divinity they knew,
When Shelley passed imparadised from view.

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IV

VILLA MAGNI

(Interior)

THEY passed me on the stair, I heard them speak,
There by the window niche, I, startled, caught
The whispered sense of words, with laughter fraught,
That haunt the echoed hall, and chambers bleak.
There Mary Shelley stands, with tresses sleek,
Her gray eyes tranquil as a promised land,
Towards her, smiling, loved guitar in hand,
Hastens Jane Williams, glance demurely meek.
"Ariel to Miranda take," she sings,
"This slave of music!" Now from o'er the lea
Trelawny, keen and bronzed, some tiding brings
Unto Claire Clairemont. Unaware I see,
There by the portal, where the thin sails loom,
Shelley and Williams, shadowed by their doom.

V

SAN TERENZO

SNUG in the hollow of her arm, the hill
Guards San Terenzo and her ancient rights,
From lonely cottage up to castled heights
Inviolate the slopes are marshalled still.
The gentle shore, responsive to the will
Of surf, enraptured ever, never bound,
Creeps to the sea and scorns the higher ground.
The ilex trees in isolation thrill,
Swayed by the alien winds that know no rest.
The shaggy crags loiter in quietude.
Where is the winged step that soared the crest
Of rock and bluff? what change may these denude
Of that loved presence mounting ledge on ledge
Of rainbow worlds, eternity to pledge?

VI

PISA

IN Dante's mediæval trappings gowned,
Serenely satisfied to tread the way
Graved in the soil by custom's antic sway,
The Pisa Shelley knew awaits the sound
Of some pale herald, pausing on his round,
With message large, the Present shall forecast.
Lung' Arno passively redreams its past.
On either broad-paved shore those homes I found,
Byron's Lanfranchi, and across the bridge,
The Tre Palazzi where the Poet dwelt:
From here to Rome along a rhythmic ridge
The plaint for Adonais flew, while knelt
A selfless brother bard, unwitting then
That his own elegy outraced his pen.

VII

SAN GIULIANO

TWO happy summers, here entranced, he spent,
This humanist of dreamers — scholar pure,
By peace elusive lulled to hopes secure,
Searching o'er lonely heights of brave intent,
For needy ones of earth, earth's betterment.
From San Giuliano to Pugnano near,
The Serchio rambles listlessly and clear,
Upon whose breast the exile found content.
Those sun-wrapped days forebode no pending ills,
As Medwin chatters, and the clouds fly low
Upon the coliseum of the hills,
And friendship on Ned Williams stamps its glow.
At Casa Prinni Shelley's Mary holds
Shelley's one babe within her mother folds.

VIII

VIA REGGIO

FROM Pisa to the sea by arbored ways,
Stirred by the fragrance of the hoary pines,
Whose branches each a poet-memory shrines,
Lies Via Reggio, plumed in golden rays,
Mute witness of the tragic masque of days.
Upon that coast Carrara's peaks enclose,
Rising like magic blooms within their snows,
A holy consecration ever stays.
Ringed in the azure haze, the islands green,
Gorgona, dim Capraja, Elba's strand —
(Guarded by gostly sentinels, I ween —)
Horizoned lie, the patriarchs of the land.
Upon those glittering sands there rests a glow,
That careless ages may their unction know.

IX

THE PROTESTANT CEMETERY AT ROME

SOMBRE unfathomably, with vistas long
Of sable cypress pointing to the sky,
Dulling the verdant pine boughs hovering nigh,
'Neath ancient walls, a silent protest strong,
A niche I see, where marble niches throng.
There rests what earth might garner — call its own
Of one who swifter than fleet winds hath flown
To some far star, previsioned in his song.
I stand beside the tablet which his friend,
Loyal Trelawny, placed upon the sod,
Simply inscribed, since Ariel must blend
With that soul-worship of a simple God.
I bow before this altar of no creed,
Knowing no offering privileged to its meed.

X

ENVOI

WILT thou, my Poet, take and sanctify
These faltering songs as tributes reverent,
Unworthy though they be, and hesitant
Beside acclaims the years shall multiply?
I pause before thy portrait, where thine eye,
With thought illumined, soars infinity;
I know that my weak praise is naught for thee,
Who need not words thy light to glorify.
Thou "rose-like flame of verse," how may I best
Unto thy heaven my poor blossoms wing,
Sheathed o'er in silence, like a prayer addressed
Unto a prophet, worn with cherishing?
How may I venture, since my awe is great,
To near thy temple where the song-crowned wait?

JOURNEYINGS

I

JOURNEY SOUTH

THE pines, whose human heart cries out, I pass,
Pass too, the sea, whose cryptic call grows dim,
Ford the horizon's cañons, where unloosed
The shadow-islands wander at their whim.

The palms, whose lips forever drink the sun,
Parched with eternal thirst despite their green,
Tower erect — and sinuous and pale
The wild sea-mosses quench the live-oak's sheen.

Past is the twilight of the gradual north,
And in its stead, night's sudden, southern wings
Fold in the world, and stem its quickened breath,
And hide in me the drought of natal springs.

II

JOURNEY NORTH

THE creeks, whose languorous arms are still,
I pass,
Pass, too, the tangle undergrowths that flare,
Leave the slight branches where a down of flame
Creeps like enkindled emeralds through the air.

The darkness glimmers where the fire-flies toss
Like cunning jugglers, balls of comet-gold,
And as I pass, they mirror to my eyes,
Inverted heavens, star-thronged manifold.

Past are they all, and now I come once more
Unto the sapless dun of earth and tree,
Where dormant April, inarticulate,
Dreams of the magic leaves that sheltered me.

TOMOKA RIVER

IN and out the River goes
In beneath the sun,
And the green things lean to it,
Drinking, one by one.

In and out the River goes,
While the palms give chase,
And the jungle-creatures pause,
Weary of the race.

In and out the River goes,
River, boat and I,
And it seems but little span
'Twixt the earth and sky.

In and out the River goes,
With its mirror breast,
And it leans so close to me
Who am spent for rest.

In and out the River goes,
Where the tall reeds sway,
Where like lily-pads adrift
Life is borne away.

Life, the River-dream, flows on
In its bounden course,
Ah, the river-folk it bears
From its mirage source!

THOUGHT-CLOUDS

TO S. S. B.

I SAW the clouds you love to-day,
Dear Lady of a distant land,
Above the peaks that barred their way
They loitered, till earth's green was spanned.

I saw the clouds you love, and knew
How dear to you those tranquil flights,
And the wing-shadows that they threw
Across the fallows 'neath the heights.

I watched the clouds you love, until
The gulls sped past them to the sea,
And a lone isle, half cloud, half hill,
Reared its brown front 'twixt you and me.

Azore Islands.

RIVIERA SHORE

ALONG the shore the currents run,
Tasselled with pennants of the sun,
Spun of fine silk, their colors seem
Shredded like ribbons in a dream.

Turquoise they gleam upon the edge,
Where the rocks shift their earth-tanned ledge,
Sapphire the vein where the mid-sea
Melts to horizon, passively.

Threaded with mesh of emerald-blue,
See, the Riviera beckons through
Her peacock plumage — whence secure
She may Ulysses man allure.

Nice.

ENGLISH LANE

UPON an English lane, the green,
Touched peaks, like chapel aisles,
And I, whose dream led me between,
Pressed through the close defiles.

Beyond the ivied hedges, on,
I fled, but as I went,
My dream I followed close upon
Until the dream was spent.

DEVON ROAD

ALONG a Devon road I fared,
Where Devon beeches grew,
The primrose sun the branches pared,
And flung his petals through.

The low breeze came, and tiptoed in,
And gathered up the bloom,
And gave it to a bird to spin
His nest in Devon coombe.

Heigho! within a Devon lane
The leaves in arches rise,
And Pan in secret holds his fane
Beneath the temple skies.

Oh, Devon is a garden web,
A garden lit with green,
Whose hawthorn torches flare and ebb
Her ivied oaks between.

And from her meadows, laced with trees,
England, with cradle charms,
The stranger rocks between her seas,
Lulled in her mother arms.

SNOW AT TWILIGHT

A STARLESS sky and a slender moon,
A silenced earth, like a silver noon,
A vision of gnomes, with brows of snow,
And the calm, wide white no bloom may know:
This is the world, and its heart is still,
It shall fret no more its changeless will,
Insensate beside its ashen hearth,
Dumb it doth lie in the ice-wind's path.



IN MEMORIAM

G. LAURA SHUMAN

(October 15, 1877–March 31, 1904)

I

THE quiet snowdrops that you loved are here,
The shimmer on the tree-trunks, purple-gray,
And slim, white birches in their twilight way,
Foreshadows of the Spring that brought you near:
Your pines, whose memoried tones you held so dear,
Await your passing greeting, satisfied
Within their shrines to guard you, deified.
Yet from low skies gemmed April whirls a tear!
O gentle heart, whose daily deeds did bless,
Whose happy hands cast treasures as they wrought,
Who knew no ill, save other souls' distress,
Who ministered unto all needy thought—
Upon what service consecrate and strong
Are you outdistanced while we watch and long?

II

DEAR fragrant Child! The songster on the hill
Echoes your name, now first unanswered, Sweet,
The shadows where the wood-roots swerve and meet
Weave in their whispers, magical and still,
The sobbing praises our dumb hearts fulfil.
Your garden-maple boasts a rounded sheath,
While proud with down of green, the grass beneath
Raises its praying fingers to your will.
We peer with heavy eyes into the Spring,
This Spring we know not, lacking hope and you,
We snare our fears, that bruise us as they wing,
Murmuring with unformed speech loved words you knew,
And to your spirit beating in our breast,
We turn like weary children home to rest.

III

"DEAR Lady Bird," I called you, smiling too,
Because your radiance dim-past Mays renewed,
And half a song seemed ready to elude
Your tender eyes, so tranquil and so true.
Full many times, it seemed that flowers grew
Hidden about you somewhere, white and sweet,
Ah, well you knew their secrets strange and fleet!
The Lady Bird the migrant winds did woo!
Ah, do you know how by your sacred fire,
We privileged ones are housed who called you friend,
Who cry, rebellious grown with quick desire,
"No other one but she our need may tend!"
Brave harvester, whose selfless dream was this,
Humbly on low and high to scatter bliss.

IV

YOU bore a constant beauty, dear, that sped
Ever to compass you about your way,
Each gracious word, which simply you would say,
Lingered in afterwarmth upon our head.
So now, to count, like maskers, in their stead
The tributes large and rare that were yourself,
Seems, as it were, to stain your gold with pelf,
To mar the founts from which your Light was shed.
You gave us Light indeed — taught us to see
Your willing faith that knew no trivial creed,
Led us, a guide unseen, to wish to be
In truth as noble as your stintless meed.
O Sweet, one surety we clasp and fold,
Your face in us, eternities behold.





In PRAISE of LEAVES

AND OTHER VERSE

M·L·P·